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NRO DECLASSIFICATION/RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS ON FILE

21 APR 1964

NRO [REDACTED]

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Acting Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Proposal for Transfer of Responsibility for Tactical U-2
Reconnaissance in Southeast Asia

REFERENCE: (a) Memorandum from McGeorge Bundy to the
Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and the
DCI, dated 1 March 1964 [REDACTED] NRO 25X1A

(b) Memorandum from Peter Jessup to the Secretary
of State, Secretary of Defense, and the DCI, dated
3 March 1964, Subject: U-2 Reconnaissance in SEASIA
[REDACTED]

NRO 25X1A

1. Since the decision on 24 February in the Special Group to conduct stepped-up U-2 reconnaissance of Southeast Asia, both by SAC and this Agency, we have had considerable experience operating under the policy provisions of references (a) and (b). While there have been no conflicts of authority stemming from either reference as between SAC and CIA, it has been obvious that the artificial restrictions on the utilization of military-marked SAC U-2s have been awkward, at best, in fulfilling existing requirements.

2. Coupled with this fact during the period in question CIA's dwindling inventory of U-2s has been further depleted by the loss on 23 March 1964 of another aircraft off Taiwan on a routine training mission. The number of available CIA U-2s now stands at an all-time low of six aircraft. At the same time active preparations are being made to commit an Agency U-2 detachment to the covert requirement of conducting reconnaissance of the Sino-Indian border early next month, and it appears probable that a carrier-based capability will be deployed against the French nuclear test area in the same period. Remaining CIA U-2 assets [REDACTED] are committed to the first priority task of conducting reconnaissance over the China Mainland. Even if it were desirable, this capability could not be effectively employed in conducting "near daily reconnaissance" of those areas in North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia presently denied to SAC U-2s.

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3. For these reasons it is recommended that you urge the Special Group to consider and approve granting permission to SAC U-2 assets now located in Saigon to cover MACV tactical reconnaissance requirements throughout the countries of North and South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia to include 34-A targets as required by CINCUSMACV. It should be made clear, however, that this relinquishing of responsibilities assigned to the Agency by competent authority, as delineated in the references, would hold true only so long as SAC assets are located in Saigon and as long as the character of the operation to protect South Vietnam does not require wholly covert over-flights of adjacent countries. Since the U-2 is capable of gliding 200 miles from an altitude of 65,000 feet in the event of a flame-out, and since there is no active air opposition in any of the countries noted above, the risk of loss of a SAC U-2 over any of these countries appears certainly no greater than it is today when shallow intrusions are permitted. Because of the geography of North Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, to retain such artificial restrictions as are contained in the references tends to defeat the purpose of positioning SAC U-2s in Southeast Asia in the first place, given the limited character of CIA U-2 assets and their other priority requirements for purely strategic covert reconnaissance.

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JAMES A. CUNNINGHAM, JR.
Deputy Assistant Director
(Special Activities)

cc: DD/S&T
DD/I

OK unlimited
→ all Laos
→ all VN upto China border
→ into Cambodia 30 miles — come to
Limited Sp. Grp. for approval deeper in Cambodia —
but SAC will fly from Saigon in
military aircraft with military pilots — not
a covert or clandestine operation
on deniable cover plan basis.